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# *Christ and the Church*

## AND OUR UNITY IN THE NORTHWEST

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*A Faith and Order Study for local groups*

## Introduction

This study guide has been prepared to help local study groups participate in preparations for a Pacific Northwest Faith and Order study conference to be held October 16-19, 1961 at Camp Menucha near Portland, Oregon. The guide is an effort to raise important questions on the theme of the conference, which is "The Nature of the Church and Our Relationship to it as Churches in the Pacific Northwest."

The Objectives of the conference are as follows:

1. To involve selected clergy and laymen of the Pacific Northwest in serious discussion of Christian unity. Specifically: What is the nature of the Church and what is our relationship to it as individual churches, communions, and councils of churches in the Pacific Northwest?
2. To further serious theological discussion in the Pacific Northwest.

Our area Faith and Order conference is in direct response to the Oberlin 1957 North American Faith and Order Conference request that Councils of Churches "devise ways whereby the churches can join together in the consideration of matters of faith and order." A more immediate stimulus was that of the Association of Council Secretaries study committee which is seeking to further the faith and order concern in Councils of Churches throughout the nation.

A committee representing diverse religious backgrounds has prepared this study guide. The first chapter on historical background was written by Professor Dan Deegan of Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and a Presbyterian clergyman. The chapter on the study of the Biblical image, the Body of Christ, was jointly written by Dr. R. H. Greenfield, an Anglican priest, and the Rev. Paul Pfotenhauer, a minister of the Lutheran Church. The chapters on "Understanding the Church in the Pacific Northwest" and "Where is the oneness of the church to be found now" were written by Dr. William B. Cate, executive secretary of the Greater Portland Council of Churches, and a Methodist clergyman.

It is requested that each study group keep a written record of the results of its studies and that these reports be sent to either the State Council of Churches or to the chairman of the planning committee, Dr. Cate, by August 1961, for circulation to conference participants and other study groups.

William B. Cate, Chairman
of Planning Committee

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Chapter One

# THE FAITH AND ORDER MOVEMENT

To understand properly the meaning of Faith and Order, we must examine the broader context of the *ecumenical* movement in the twentieth century. Before doing so, however, we shall make a few preliminary comments concerning the meaning of the term *"ecumenical"*.

In a number of New Testament texts *oikoumene* simply means "the whole world", without any specific cultural or political connotation, e.g. Acts 17.31. There are other texts where *oikoumene* is used in the sense of the one great political unit, the Empire, e.g. Luke 2.1. Hebrews 2.5. suggests that the true *oikoumene* is that of the Kingdom of Christ. The text used the expression *oikoumene mellousa,* the coming of a new and transformed *oikoumene* under the direct rule of Jesus Christ. The word "ecumenical" enters into official ecclesiastical usage when, in the year 381 A.D., the Council of Constantinople speaks of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) as an "ecumenical synod". Since the ecumenical council is regarded as the highest organ of the church and its decisions possess general authority and validity in the life of the Church, the word "ecumenical" acquires the connotation of that which is accepted as authoritative and valid throughout the whole Church. The Oxford Conference of 1937, to which reference will be made below, did much to give the word "ecumenical" the kind of meaning which it tends to enjoy in present day usage. This conference declared: "The term ecumenical refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the Church. The thought and action of the Church are ecumenical, in so far as they attempt to realize the *Una Sancta,* the fellowship of Christians, who acknowledge the one Lord." From 1937 on, the term "ecumenical" has been used in both the traditional sense of "concerning the Church as a whole", and in the more modern senses of "concerning the relationship of different churches" and "expressing the consciousness of the wholeness of the church." "Ecumenical" points to the fact of the Church's unity in Christ and to the desire of Christians in the various churches to manifest and to realize this unity more effectively in space and time.

In describing the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, we must not suppose that it represents an entirely new trend in Christendom, unrelated to the past. As Stephen Neil reminds us: "Almost from the beginning division has been present in the Christian Church, but division has never been finally acquiesced in as the normal condition of that Church. The vision of perfect unity, sometimes faint and elusive, has always been before the eyes of Christians, and in every Church and age some have been found ready to pursue that vision . . . In Christendom, there is hardly any Christian body which has remained untouched by aspirations after Christian unity and by efforts to promote it. All the great historic Protestant confessions—Lutheran, Reformed, and others—have been involved, some of them for centuries, in ecumenical concerns." ("Epilogue," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* 1517-1948, p. 725).

Actually the Reformers never imagined that after their time there could be Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregationalist, Baptist and Methdist Churches quite distinct from one another. The Reformers sought not to destroy the Church as a united and visible body, but to strengthen and cleanse it by the restoration of its apostolic form. The tragedy is that the

Reformers' determination to restore the Church from within led to ruptures in the Church's visible unity. It is Calvin who said: "Among the greatest evils of our time must be counted the fact that the churches are so disunited. So far as I am concerned, if I can do anything to help, I shall not hesitate to cross ten oceans to serve this cause."

The origins of the twentieth century ecumenical movement lie in the mission field. The World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh, 1910. This meeting was actually the outgrowth and climax of earlier gatherings through which Protestants had been drawing together in their purpose to promulgate the gospel to the world. John R. Mott presided over most of the sessions at Edinburgh and later became chairman of the International Missionary Council, which was conceived at Edinburgh and came into full existence in 1921. Edinburgh 1910 marked a new sense of fellowship among Christians. In his address which closed the Conference, Mott declared that "gathered together from different nations and races and communions" the delegates had come to realize their "oneness in Christ". A fellowship has been found in Christ which transcended human barriers, and the growing realization of this fellowship was to be one of the significant characteristics of the ecumenical movement. Edinburgh gave the real impulse which issued in the first World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927.

Before we look at the significance of this conference, however, we must note the origin of the Life and Work Movement at Stockholm in 1925. This movement owes much to Dr. Nathan Soderblom, who was the Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala when the 1925 conference convened. The aim of the conference was well expressed in the sub-title of its hymn book: *Communio in adorando et serviendo oecumenica.* The conference combined reverent worship and an effort to survey the whole range of Christian social concern. Strong theological differences and confessional cleavages became manifest in the course of the conference. And while it did not solve any controversial problems of Christian action, it did appeal to the conscience of the Christian world and indicated possible lines of advance. It appointed a Continuation Committee which in 1930 was reconstituted as a permanent body, the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work.

Among those attending the Edinburgh conference in 1910 was Charles Brent, Bishop of the American Episcopal Church in the Phillipine Islands. Before he left Edinburgh, Brent told friends that he had made the resolve to call his own church to take the lead in preparing another conference, this to deal with matters of faith and order, relating to the doctrine of the Church and the nature of unity in the Church. The Cincinnati General Convention of the American Episcopal Church in 1910 adopted the following resolution which had been proposed by Rev. W. T. Manning, later Bishop of New York: "That a Joint Commission be appointed to bring about a Conference for the consideration of questions touching Faith and Order, and that all Christian Communions throughout the world which confess Our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour be asked to unite with us in arranging for and conducting such a Conference." Ten years after the Edinburgh Conference, Bishop Brent told members of the preliminary meeting on Faith and Order at Geneva how Edinburgh had led him to propose to

his church to issue a call for a World Conference on Faith and Order.

"It is ten years since a little seed was sown by a General Convention of the church to which I owe particular allegiance. All the Christian communions have watered that little seed and God has give it increase. The seed was a call sent out in 1910 to Christendom to join in a common effort to reach after, not our own conception of unity, but Christ's ideal.

. . . At various stages in the history of Christendom there have been invitatior from one communion to others to unite with the communion issuing the call, in the hope that unity might come about by absorption or federation. But our invitation was different. It was not that one communion aimed to draw into itself all others who worship our Lord Jesus Christ as God, or that we should patch ourselves together, but that all should accept the ideal unity of our Lord, and together move toward it. Our call for a conference was merely taking the earliest step toward the coveted end, not knowing quite where God would eventually lead us." (Quoted in *The Ecumenical Review*, July 1960, p. 408)

It was not until after World War I that full-scale preparations began to be made for the conference. Church leaders meeting in Geneva in 1920 appointed a Continuation Committee which held its second meeting in Stockholm in 1925 and called the World Conference on Faith and Order for 1927 to be held at Lausanne, Switzerland. There were present 385 men and nine women. The Lausanne meeting made certain efforts to define the Church. The Report of the conference lists several concepts from the New Testament: the people of the New Covenant; the Body of Christ; and the Temple of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Reference is made in the report to the words of the Nicene Creed concerning the "One holy catholic and apostolic church". In a functional sense, the Church is seen as an instrument of witness "by life and word by which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, reconciles men to God through faith." A list of six characteristics is presentd as a means for identifying the Church:

(1) the Word of God as given in Holy Scripture
(2) faith in God incarnate and revealed in Christ
(3) Christ's commission to preach the Gospel
(4) observance of the Sacraments
(5) the ministry of the Word and Sacraments
(6) "A fellowship in prayer, in worship, in all the means of Grace, in the pursuit of holiness, and in the service of man." (Lausanne Report, pp 7-8) Lausanne recognized the importance of the ministry in the life and order of the Church and called for "a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church of Christ as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole Body."

A Continuation Committee was appointed at Lausanne with Bishop Brent as chairman. Brent died in 1929 and William Temple the then Archbishop of York, was elected chairman of this committee. Temple had also played a prominent part in the Life and Work Conference at Oxford. Temple's leadership in the ecumenical movement continued up to the time of his death in 1944. Preparations were made for a second Faith and Order Conference which was held in Edinburgh, August, 1937. In July of the

same year, Life and Work met at Oxford, England. The Edinburgh Conference divided into five sections whose subjects were:

(1) The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
(2) The Church of Christ and the Word of God
(3) The Church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments
(4) The Church's Unity in Life and Worship
(5) The Communion of Saints

The following comes from the Edinburgh report on Faith and Order:

"We are at one in confessing belief in the Holy Catholic Church. We acknowledge that through Jesus Christ, particularly through the fact of His resurrection, of the gathering of His disciples round their crucified, risen, and victorious Lord, and of the coming of the Holy Spirit, God's Almighty will constituted the Church on earth.

"The Church is the people of the new covenant, fulfilling and transcending all that Israel under the old convenant foreshadowed. It is the household of God, the family in which the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is to be realized in the children of His adoption. It is the body of Christ, whose members derive their life and oneness from their one living Head; and thus it is nothing apart from Him, but is in all things dependent upon the power of salvation which God has committed to His Son."

The Oxford and Edinburgh conferences appointed seven persons each, and these fourteen persons were to plan a constitution for a World Council of Churches. At Utrecht in 1938 a provisional committee was established under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, with Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft as secretary. It should be noted that the Edinburgh Conference of 1937 had agreed that Faith and Order should become part of the World Council of Churches when its first assembly was held. The Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference became the World Council's mission on Faith and Order.

The origin of the World Council of Churches, formed to carry on the two world movements for Faith and Order and for Life and Work, was the Amsterdam Assembly in 1948. Words used at this assembly by Dr. Visser't Hooft describe the situation best:

"We are a Council of Churches not the council of the one undivided Church. Our name indicates our weakness and our shame before God, for there can be and there *is* finally only one Church of Christ on earth . . . Our Council represents, therefore, an emergency solution—a stage on the road—a body living between the time of complete isolation of the churches from each other and the time—on earth or in heaven—when it will be visibly true that there is one Shepherd and one flock."

147 churches from 44 countries were represented at Amsterdam by 351 delegates and 238 alternates. The Second Assembly was held at Evanston, Illinois in August, 1954. The Third Assembly is to be held in New Delhi, India, in November, 1961. We are not to think of the World Council simply as a Protestant and Anglican body, for there are Orthodox churches represented in the Council. These include the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the

Romanian Orthodox episcopate in America, the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America, the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Archdiocese of New York and All North America. Special mention of the presence of the Orthodox Church in the World Council must be made, for the Orthodox Church provides important contributions to Faith and Order. The Orthodox Church seeks to adhere to the principles and piety of the early, undivided Catholic Church. In order and doctrine the Orthodox Church claims to be the real embodiment and continuation of this undivided church. Edmund Schlink insists that "the Orthodox Church is in fact the indispensable third party in the meeting of the other two great blocs of Christendom, Protestantism and Catholicism. It has preserved with the fewest changes the substance and structure of the early Church, on the basis of which the Roman Church then underwent a considerable further development and alteration, while the Reformers, on the other hand, beginning anew with the Scriptures, thought at the same time that they were going back to the fundamental decisions of the early Church and purifying them of later accretions." (Schlink, "The Ecumenical Contribution of the Russian Orthodox Church", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, March, 1959, p. 61. The Russian Orthodox Church as such is not presently in the World Council.)

The basis for membership in the World Council adopted at Utrecht in 1938 and confirmed at the first Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 is as follows: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches has during the summer of 1960 approved a revised statement of the basis for World Council of Churches membership: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Final action on this revised basis for membership will be taken at the third World Assembly in New Delhi, India, in November, 1961.

The Constitution of the World Council of Churches designates the following functions of the Faith and Order Commission:

(1) To proclaim the essential oneness of the Church of Christ and to keep prominently before the World Council and the churches the obligation to manifest that unity and its urgency for the work of evangelism.

(2) To study questions of faith, order and worship within the relevant social, cultural, political, racial and other facts in their bearing on the unity of the churches.

(3) To study the theological implications of the existence of the ecumenical movement.

(4) To study matters in the present relationships of the churches to one another which cause difficulties and need theological clarification.

(5) To provide information concerning actual steps taken by the churches towards reunion.

The Central Committee, meeting in Toronto in 1950, sought to clarify the ecclesiological significance of the World Council by sending on to the churches as a basis for further study a statement entitled "The Church, the

Churches and the World Council of Churches". This document indicates that the World Council is not based on any one particular conception of the Church, or of the unity of the Church. It exists in order that the Churches may face their differences and that the various conceptions of unity may be propounded and confront one another. It was confirmed that the main convictions underlying the World Council are that Christ is the Head of the Church, which is His Body, that the Church is one, and that each Church should do its utmost to manifest the essential oneness of the Church. The Toronto statement is important, for it indicates the general framework of thinking within which further conversations on Faith and Order have been carried on in the past decade. It is well to note what the Toronto statement does affirm. As Visser't Hooft declares: " . . . We stated positively that we are a body which seeks to prepare the way for manifest, tangible unity, because that is clearly what the New Testament understands by unity." (Address at Lund, 1952, in *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, p. 134)

The Faith and Order Commission held its third world conference at Lund, 1952. For the first time Roman Catholic observers, four in number, were appointed, a significant sign that the Roman Church is not indifferent to the proceedings of Faith and Order. (Just recently Pope John XXIII has established a new Vatican Secretariat for the question of unity headed by Cardinal Bea.) Three preparatory theological commissions were at work prior to Lund. They had been appointed in 1938 and 1939 to study (1) the Church, (2) Ways of Worship, and (3) Intercommunion. They each issued reports which contributed to the Lund meeting and to subsequent discussions.

The Lund meeting has proved to be pivotal for subsequent work in the field of Faith and Order. The Faith and Order movement was founded to enable the churches to grow by discussion in mutual understanding so that they might be in a better position to initiate action. The Lund meeting contributed noticeably to the deepening of efforts to understand the nature of the Church *exegetically and theologically*. Lund marks the end of an era of discussion based primarily on "comparative ecclesiology". In other words, something more was needed than a comparison of denominational positions on such themes as the ministry and Sacraments. It was found that such comparisons may serve only to harden differences already existing between the Churches. In the words of O. S. Tomkins, secretary of the Lund conference: "Our various 'confessional positions' tend to become embattled ramparts which we are determined to defend rather than confessions of faith under which we march out to witness to a common Lord." (*Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, p. 167) Faith and Order does not seek agreement simply at the level of the lowest common denominator of concurrence. It does not stand for a reduction in what the churches should believe and practice. But it does seek to penetrate behind our present divisions to seek a deeper and fuller understanding of the truth about the Person of Christ and His Church. Faith and Order stands for nothing other than a renewal of the Church's mind as it grows up into Christ, placing itself under His judgment. The Lund report reminds us that "we cannot build the one Church by cleverly fitting together our divided inheritances. We can grow together towards fullness and unity in Christ only by being

conformed to Him who is the Head of the Body and Lord of His People."

What those working at Lund sought to provide was a more adequate *theological* method whereby we could think together our faith in the One Christ, beginning thus with the very center of that faith and proceeding on this *Christological* basis to attempt to think through our differences in regard to the nature of the Church, its ministry, its sacraments. Lund recognized the need for a common study of Christology, "for surely it is chiefly in a deeper common understanding of the central mysteries of the Person and work of Christ that we shall get more light upon the derived and complementary mysteries of the nature of His Body and Bride, the Church." (Tomkins op. cit., p. 173) The approach taken at Lund seeks to understand the Church not simply in institutional terms, but in terms of the very Gospel itself in its witness to the One Christ and the reconciliation accomplished in Him for our sakes. The *Order* of the Church is to be viewed in integral relation to those events in the Gospel history which gave birth to the Church. "The Church . . . is defined not in terms of itself, but in terms of Christ, whose Gospel created it and whose life is its indwelling life." (Ramsey, *The Gospel and Catholic Church*, p. 66) The work at Lund recognized clearly that *the Church is itself part of the Gospel*: Christ came into the world for the sake of those whom He wished to save and as the Christ He gives Himself to men and offers Himself up for men in such a way that He binds Himself to men.This is nothing other than the love with which Christ loves the Church, as the body of those who participate in His life. Christ enters into our place, identifying Himself with us and making us one with Himself. In His baptism in the Jordan, Christ affiirms His solidarity with sinners, and this is the pattern of His whole ministry. On the cross, we see the Judge Himself accepting judgment, taking on Himself the condemnation that belongs to mankind. Christ has entered into our place in order to put us in the right with God, that we might be received and accepted by Him. *The fact of the Church springs from the fact of the Gospel, for the Church has reference to our union with Christ in His accomplished work of reconciliation.*

"For the Son of man . . . came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mk. 10.45.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Mk. 14.23.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10.11.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." 2 Cor. 5.14-15.

The Lund meeting sought to take with full seriousness the New Testament assertions concerning the reconciliation between God and man as accomplished in Christ and through Him embracing all mankind. Our participation in this reconciliation involves our being "in Christ," i.e. participation in His life, death, and resurrection. And to be "in Christ" is to be in the Church. As Claude Welch puts it: "One is never alone in Christ. Membership in him is at the same time membership in one another. There is no purely private Christianity, for to be in Christ is to be in the church,

and to be in the church is to be in Christ, and any attempt to separate relation to Christ in faith from membership in the church is a perversion of the New Testament understanding." (*The Reality of the Church*, p. 165)

Lund emphasized the conception of the Church as the Body of Christ, stressing the unity of the people of God, the proper differentiation of functions within the Church, the importance of the visible and historical ordering of the Church's life, and the dependence of the members upon the Head, Christ. There can be only one Church because there is only one Christ, one body of Christ. Christ is not divided and, therefore, He cannot have two or more bodies. The plural ecclesiai (churches) occurs frequently in the New Testament, but it never means "denominations". It refers to the one Church of Christ manifest in a given place and in communion with other Christians who are also "in Christ". There is no justification, theological, spiritual, or Biblical for the existence of a plurality of Churches genuinely separated and mutually excluding one another in recognition of ministry and sacraments. The supposition that there could be several independent Christian societies, or denominations, with only a spiritual unity and no visible bonds of effective communion and recognition is totally alien to the thought of St. Paul.

The Church, according to the New Testament, is neither an invisible entity nor a Platonic "idea", but possesses actual bodily existence. The whole emphasis of Faith and Order means that *the outward and visible forms of unity in the life of the Church do matter*. The unity of the Church with which Faith and Order is concerned is not simply inward and spiritual; it involves also the outward and visible coherence of those who are "in Christ".

The Lund Report declares "Jesus Christ . . . is the head of the Church which is His Body. Through His Spirit Jesus Christ Himself is present in His Church. Christ lives in His Church and the Church lives in Christ . . . As members of His Body we are made one with Him in the fellowship of His life, death and resurrection, of His suffering and His glory. For what concerns Christ concerns His Body also. What has happened to Christ uniquely in His once-for-all death and resurrection on our behalf, happens also to the Church in its way as His Body."

However, if we must emphasize the close relationship which obtains between Christ and the Church, we must also say that Christ is distinguished from the Church. Christ has risen from the dead and the Church in its earthly-historical existence remains under the judgment of her Lord. The Church is thus summoned to look beyond its historical forms in this world to the day when Christ will change the body of our humiliation and make it like unto the Body of His Glory. The very bodily and historical existence of the Church requires structural and temporal order, but such order serves as a sign and provisional representation of the new creation, the new order which God has established through the death and resurrection of Christ. Eschatology, the doctrine concerning Christ's final parousia and the consummation of all things, is no mere appendix to our faith or some final chapter in theology, but *rather it is the perspective within which we must see the whole life of the Church in its relation to Christ, the Lord who comes in His freedom to be* present to the Church and who will come at the Last Day.

The deepening of our understanding of the unity and coherence of those who are members of Christ's Body has meant a criticism of the present situation in Christendom, where varying denominations exist alongside of one another, some of which do not recognize the full validity of the ministry and sacraments of other churches. O. S. Tomkins states the matter as follows: "By entering into this relationship with each other we have already willed the death of our denominations . . . Although the World Council is a Council of Denominations, because there are no other units with which it would work, it has already destroyed the justification of our denominations. The essence of denominationalism is to suppose the sufficiency of denominations: the essence of our covenant with each other is to deny that our denominations are enough . . . Nothing in the biblical conception of the Church nor in the lives of primitive Christians, will allow us to affirm forever that we have unity in Christ and deny that we have unity in the Church." (*The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, p. 167, p. 172) D. M. Baillie in his sermon, "The Temple of the Lord", delivered at Lund suggests the need for our real act of penitence for the divided state of the Church of Christ, for our separation from one another.

Faith and Order is the work of churches meeting for the express purpose of seeking God's will for unity. The Faith and Order Commission does not seek to usurp the free and autonomous decisions which a given denomination must make as it enters into specific conversations with another denomination. The Commission cannot enact any given scheme of unity, but it does seek to be a forum in which concrete plans for unity may be shared and discussed. Further, the Faith and Order Commission stands for a ceaseless effort to know concretely what obedience to God's will for unity means. Faith and Order reminds us that unity is no mere contingent feature of the Church's life, but is of the essence of this life. The overcoming of disunity is not a task with which Christians may dispense but a necessity of the Church's real existence in obedience to Christ. In its 1959 report to the Central Committee, the Commission declares: "Faith and Order must constantly press upon . . . the churches the fact that the question of unity is one upon which an answer has to be given, and that to give no answer means to be shut up in the wrong answer." In its attempt to define unity the Commission in 1959 spoke as follows: "The unity which is both God's will and His gift to His Church is one which brings all in each place who confess Jesus Christ as Lord into a fully committed fellowship with one another through one baptism into him, centered in the preaching of the one Gospel and the breaking of the one bread, having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all; and which at the same time unites them with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that both ministry and members are acknowledged by all, and that all can act and work together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls the Church."

# II

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

*Thesis*: That the dominant theological type of church that has prevailed in the Pacific Northwest has been the sectarian as contrasted to the more churchly type (1). Through its formative impact in the past and lingering influence in the present, in the still prevalent rural image of the Church, this frontier type image has great implications for our understanding of the Church in the Pacific Northwest. This concept has important theological ramifications as we seek to understand the Church as a corporate body, the importance of unity for the Church and the responsibility of the Church to transform the culture in which it finds itself.

*Issue* I. What were the characteristics of the various migrations and immigrations that came into the Pacific Northwest? What was the type of Church that these population movements brought? Does the Canadian situation differ from the American in this regard?

*Statement.* Early migrations were composed of stable people, not frontier drifters, who brought with them their community life and civilization such as schools, government and Churches (2.) The Churches that seemed to prosper most in this largely rural area in the early days were the three successful frontier and very American denominations, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Disciples of Christ. The Disciples of Christ were the only truly indigenous American denomination. According to American Church historians (See bibliography) the denominations of the East, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian did not do well on the frontier because of their institutional inflexibility and institutionalization to particular social groups. They grew rapidly only when a more urban culture developed in the Northwest.

Later immigration to the Pacific Northwest came from the north of Europe, and the Pacific Northwest did not, like the rest of the United States, experience a shift in the origin of immigrants from the north of Europe to the south of Europe. The Pacific Northwest continued to draw most heavily from Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and the British Isles. By 1910 more than 90,000 people had come from Scandinavia and the immigration remained unabated until 1924.

The last migration to the Pacific Northwest, involving a half-million people, came from the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas at the time of the Great Dust Bowl in the 1930's bringing again largely Northern European people. Although no studies are available for the whole area, observation indicates that these two immigrations brought primarily the Lutheran Church bodies with their strong doctrinal orientation and more churchly concept of the church.

It was the early migration with the sectarian churches of the frontier, however, that set the theological tone of the region. Even some of the Lutheran bodies from the Mid-West did not escape the formative impact of the frontier

*Questions*

1. What is the history of your denomination's entry into the Pacific Northwest?
2. Is the "Statement" correct in its evaluation of the success of the three frontier denominations?
3. Do you feel that the categorization of sect and church is the best method to help us understand the contrasting types of churches that have been established in our area?

*Issue* II. The Pacific Northwest was a part of the American Frontier. Understanding our frontier religious heritage is very important in determining how the church manifests itself in this region. It is very determinative of the dominant concept of the church that has prevailed in the past and still casts its lingering shadow in the present.

*Statement.* One scholar portrays the influence of the frontier on American Christianity in this way: "No other one factor contributed more to the triumph of the dissenting-revivalistic form of Protestantism in American life than the frontier. It provided a far flung social setting congenial to the Gospel of the Disinherited. It provided a frontierized Protestantism" (3). At this point it should be explained that from the frontier perspective of American life every section that was settled after the original colonies was considered the frontier West. It is from studies in these other areas of the frontier drama that we must draw insights applicable to our own Pacific Northwest region. It is a general impression, accepted by many observers, that the Northwest in its Church life is at least a quarter of a century slower in its development than in most other parts of the country.

H. Richard Niebuhr modifies Mecklin's blanket statement with this insight into the variation of influence that the frontier has had on the demoninations. "Almost all of the churches in America," he writes, "have at some time or another lived on the frontier, and almost all of them have retained some of the marks of the character which it sought to impress on them. In a very general sense it is true that under the influence of frontier conditions the churches of Europe, after migrating to America, have tended to become sects, and that with the passing of the frontier and with the establishment of ordered society the sects of Europe and America have tended to become churches. Yet the influence of the frontier on the denominations has been very unequal. Some of them, by virtue of a rigid constitution acquired in earlier history, were able to resist the influence of border life or were unable to adapt themselves to it. Others again by virtue of their earlier character were attracted to the frontier as a fitting field for their labors and readily adjusted themselves to its needs; some denominations from the beginning of their American history, sought their membership only among those European classes or nationalities which found their home in the Mercantile East or in the Semi-Aristocratic plantation South; others again needed to follow their European adherents to the wilderness and to remain alien to the interest of the established south; still other denominations were native-born, having originated in frontier religious revolts" (4).

The two most favored churches in the colonial period, the Congregational and Episcopal, were at least prepared to meet the problems of the West. Actually, three denominations were best able to meet the needs of the frontier West in America. These were, as it has been said, the churches

of the Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ. William Warren Sweet, American church historian, says of the Baptists, "The phenominal growth of the Baptist denomination in the United States has been due to four main factors: First, the simplicity of its doctrine; second, the democracy of its organization; third, its ability to propogate itself without overhead machinery; and fourth, its appeal to the common man because of its simple Doctrine and its democratic polity. Or to put it another way, the Baptist found in America, and especially in frontier America, a soil suited to its peculiar genius (5). The Methodist Church was equally flexible to the frontier. Its hierarchical church polity served no hardship but rather acted as a coordinator of effort. The Methodist Conference was not so much an administrative power structure as a brotherhood that represented the ministers. The clergy were moved to new stations more by the needs of the work than by the whims of the hierarchy or the welfare of the ministry. The itinerant Methodist circuit riders ministered to settlers in all places, taking with them their doctrinal emphasis which laid stress upon freedom of the will and individual responsibility. The latter idealogy was in complete harmony with the prevailing mood of the western pioneers. The Methodists were riding on the crest of the evangelical awakening, carrying John Wesley's concern for the "lostness" of man without Christ.

By 1855 it could be said that Methodists and Baptists had come to a dominant position in American church life, accounting for nearly 70 percent of the total number of Protestant communicants. They epitomized frontierized religion and any denomination which sought to deal with the West had, to a large degree, to assume their spirit. H. Richard Niebuhr claims that the Baptists tended to evangelize the Southwest, whereas the Methodists folllowed the pioneers toward the Northwest. In Oregon and Washington, in frontier times, the advantage lay with the Methodists.

Professor Ronald Osborne, in his book "The Spirit of American Christianity", has catalogued some of the characteristics of American frontier Christianity. In all too brief a form let me list them:

1. Localism—Local autonomy or the democratic congregational church polity recommended itself to the West. It resented control from the East or hierarchial centralization.
2. Individualism—This is a corollary of localism. An independent, self-sufficient, spirit dominated religion of the West, sometimes manifested itself in an exaggerated independency which expresses itself in a spirit of separation. Many local congregations had little sense of really belonging to their own denomination as a spiritual friendship, to say nothing of participating in or being a part of the universal church.
3. Break with Tradition—There was a rejection by many of the institutions and vehicles that transmit tradition such as creeds, liturgy, ecclesiastical offices, etc. A feeling for the church as a historical fellowship was often lost.
4. Simple Faith—To be a Christian meant to love the Lord and do His will, not to argue interminably about fine points of dogma. This was a missionary situation which demanded action, not theological reflection. Also the influence of pietism ran strongly in many religious groups which came to the New World; it emphasized experience rather than theology, and devaluated the corporate institution of the

church in favor of the individual experience. The puritanical moralism of much American preaching through our history easily falls into legalism and self-righteousness; yet it was a major contribution of our churches to the civilizing of the rude frontier.

5. Uneducated Clergy—A corollary of the simple faith was the uneducated clergy that preached it. Most of the frontier clergy in the Methodist, Baptist, and Disciple churches had not studied "divinity". This was in contrast to the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Congregationalists who maintained the most rigid standard of clerical training but were ineffective in meeting the religious demands of the frontier. The church was lay dominated. Some of the clergy were little better trained than the laity. An anti-clerical strain from the frontier church still remains today.
6. Revivalism—Revivalism was the evangelistic method that the frontier churches used to evangelize the West. It laid stress on individual salvation and had a great emotional appeal. This method gave little sense of corporate responsibility for the community in which the person lived and the church was located.
7. Activism—The missionary demands of the West were so great that action based on the faith, not reflection about the faith, was the requirement of the times.
8. A Preaching-Centered Church—The more liturgical and sacramentally oriented Protestant churches did not prosper on the frontier. Times were crude and tastes were simple.

The church of the frontier could be characterized as a sect-type church which was pietistic, moralistic, revivalistic, individualistic, untheological and drew a sharp line between itself and the world. Although the word sect is a term with broad connotations it does serve to indicate the nature of frontier religion as it manifested itself on the frontier as it existed in the Pacific Northwest.

*Questions*

1. To what degree has our frontier heritage conditioned the concept of the church held by your denomination? Is there a difference between the theological outlook of laity in the church and the denomination's official theology of the church?
2. How important is the lingering spirit of frontier religion in the secular culture and the total life of the church of the Pacific Northwest today?
3. Does our frontier past help to explain the lack of theological concern in our churches? Does the lack of theological discrimination explain the lack of concern for faith and order matters and little motivation for Christian unity?
4. How did the Roman Catholic Church accommodate itself to frontier conditions?

*Issue III.* After its frontier period the Pacific Northwest became a more settled agrarian territory. The frontier sect became a rural church, and as metropolitan urban areas developed the rural church took on a more churchly attitude, and churches of the commercial cast began to prosper in this more congenial atmosphere. The church-sect thesis of Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr again sheds light on the process. The so-called

fundamentalist-liberal controversy, which is still a real issue in the Pacific Northwest, can be partially understood as a conflict between urban and rural religion.

*Statement.* The dominant denominations in the Pacific Northwest today, excepting possibly the Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist, were frontier sectarian bodies that have developed into rural and in some cases urban churches. H. Richard Neibuhr describes the way this transition took place, "The transition from frontier to established society is not without intermediate stages in which the social character of denominationalism again comes to light. The frontier usually passes from the pioneer stage into a period of settled agricultural life. A relatively stable and homogeneous rural population takes the place of the shifting early settlers. The folkways and mores of an older society reassert themselves; social institutions are established; in the individual life the milder emotions cultivated by ritual take the place of the unstable but extreme experiences of despair and assurance, which the constant crisis of frontier existence called forth; the earlier individualism in government, economy, morality and religion makes way for trust in social institutions and forms. The frontier sect becomes a rural church, in which the sharply defined character, inherited from the pioneer days, has been modified by the influence of social habit" (6).

In the rural church many sectarian characteristics remain, but more churchly forms emerge. The revival of the frontier sect looses its spontaneous character and itself becomes a ritual. The sectarian organization takes on churchly aspects such as means of education in Sunday Schools and other agencies, whereby, the second and third generation may be instructed in the ways of the fathers. Creeds, whether written or unwritten, become increasingly important as symbols of social unity and social differentation.

The sociological process, whereby the sect develops into the church, has been well documented by many scholars and is fairly widely known. Ernst Troeltsch first presented the illuminating thesis of the church and sect. H. Richard Niebuhr has further modified it to show how the sect in the American scene developed into the church. Most of our denominations are situated somewhere on a continuum between the sectarian characteristic and the churchly characteristics of the Christian church. The interrelatedness of the sociological and theological, in our understanding of the church at this point, raises important considerations for discussion in our conference preparation. Most of the sects originated among the economically underprivileged people who found conventional religion unsuited to their needs. The people of the frontier manifested these qualities of the disinherited. The middle class, cultured and established churches of the East could not meet the needs of the frontier. Many Congregationalists from New England, as well as the more intellectual Presbyterians on the frontier, became Baptists.

Elmer Clark describes this process as he still sees it at work in contemporary America. "Finding themselves ill at ease in the presence of an effete and prosperous bourgeoisie, their emotional natures unsatisfied by a middle-class complacency, their economic problems disregarded by those who have no such problems to meet, and their naive faith and simple interpretation smiled upon by their more cultured fellows, the poor and ignorant revolt and draw apart into groups which are more congenial." (7).

The Sectarians elevate the necessity of their close frugality, humility and industry into moral virtues and regard as sins the practices they are prevented from embracing. These virtues, moral and spiritual, and the economic forces which in one generation drew the sect out of the church raises them in the economic scale and as a result, the social scale, and turns the sect gradually into a church. As the early frontier forefathers came to the Pacific Northwest their churches were of a sectarian variety. Industry in a fertile land made them prosperous. Their children had more privileges, better education, and rose in the social scale and thus desired a more churchly type of Christian group with a more sophisticated theology, worship and practice.

As these churches became middle class and self-satisfied, the later underprivileged immigrations felt unaccepted, even rejected, and so new sects began. Witness the uncommonly large number of independent Bible churches and small sectarian groups we have in the Pacific Northwest.

The new factor, however, in the life of the Pacific Northwest is its growing urbanization. We are told that we will soon have one great Megalopolis stretching from Vancouver, B. C. on the north to Eugene, Oregon, on the South. With the growing urbanization of the Pacific Northwest it is interesting to contemplate the question as to what type of churches will best meet the needs of the urban centers with their great suburban bedroom areas. Historically the more churchly type religious institution with its developed rational doctrine, dignified worship and sophisticated tastes has best met these needs. However, the working classes are still largely neglected by these churches in our urban centers. For the Protestant churches with their tendency to accommodate to social class, this is still an unsolved problem.

To one observer it seems that a basic difficulty with the effectiveness of the church in the Pacific Northwest is the lingering presence of the frontier-rural image of the church in the face of the growing urbanized and sophisticated culture. The church is caught in a cultural lag with a sectarian heritage which renders it ineffective in now penetrating the culture with the Christian Gospel and in understanding the church in spite of its many parts as being one fellowship, one family, the Body of Christ. The vigor of the frontier sect-type church is gone, and now we have only the remnant of the social forms of the church that clothed it. The anti-intellectualism expressed in the lack of theological thinking among the clergy and laity and bibliolatry on the part of fundamentalists stands in the way of a return to the profound resources of the Bible which is the historic source of the renewal of the church. We have seen how the church of the West has been conditioned to a great extent by the economic and social forces of society. It is possible for a church to be a captive of culture. The church works in the world but is not of the world. The church that takes its shape from an intelligent Biblical theology which seeks to know the mind of the Lord will be the church that most closely approximates the *UNA SANCTA* and transforms culture, not merely reflects it.

One final problem should be highlighted because of its importance in the Pacific Northwest. It is the gulf that still exists between the so-called liberals and the fundamentalists. It is the writer's conviction that this is simply another manifestation of the rural-urban, sect-church conflict. This conflict

originally had a theological base in the reaction of the defenders of historic, orthodox theology against the accommodation of the church to modern science and secular philosophy. Theological differences are still present in the conflict.

The movement itself, however, can best be understood in terms of the conflict of the rural church with the church movement that is seeking to deal with problems of an urban culture.

We have seen how many of the churches of the Pacific Northwest have a sect background and how the rural image of the church has predominated. The urban church with its social gospel and liberal theology was a result of the church seeking to come to grips with the problem of developing urban environment and growing scientific knowledge. Most young ministers taking churches in the Northwest in the last 30 years, in the established churches, have been trained in the seminaries of the East, Mid-West or at the seminaries in California staffed by Eastern trained scholars. The Fundamentalists have been largely trained in local Bible schools or nationally known fundamentalist Bible colleges.

This observer notes two things that have happened to the church in the Pacific Northwest due to the impact of the better trained clergy. First, conservative segments of the established denominations have split off into new denominations. Witness, for example, the Evangelical Methodists, Independent Christians and small splinter Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. Secondly, dissatisfied members of the regular churches have joined more conservative churches. Thus we have sizeable Bible churches of various types which appeal to the unhappy of the established denominations. These churches have also been most active in welcoming the disinherited of the late migrations to the Pacific Northwest, as the established denominations become self absorbed, respectable middle class churches.

*Questions*

1. Does the church-sect thesis adequately explain the growth of the numerous sect churches of late origin in the Pacific Northwest?
2. Do you note any trends in your denomination to become institutionalized to any particular social class, economic group, or intellectual level?
3. What image of the church do we need to meet the demands of our growing urban culture? What type of church can best reach the working class of our cities that are largely neglected?
4. Is the analysis of the Liberal-fundamentalist problem adequate? What other explanations would you offer?
5. What areas of our understanding of the church in the Pacific Northwest have been neglected by this chapter of the study guide?

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER II

1. The concept of the church and sect is an effort to set ideal types that will help us to see the variation by which the church manifests itself in culture, and the manner in which culture and theology are related. Ernst Troeltsch made the first definition which has been refined by subsequent scholars. Actually the historical reality of the church can be found on a continuum between these two ideal-types.

*Church* — According to the churchly type, men are physically born into the church. The great organic and unifying philosophy of the churchly type views the church as the mystical embodiment of the living Christ reaching back in unbroken cultural continuity to the early church. It is institutional, a permanent part of the cultural heritage upon which it depends for its continuity and integrity. The church type tends to seek the ideal Christian order by compromising with existing society. Its ethic tends to become secular and relativistic.

*Sect* — For the sect-type a man is not born into a church; he voluntarily unites with it after he has been converted. Sectarian piety is often at first indifferent and even antagonistic to orthodox theology. It seeks primarily the satisfaction of the emotional life rather than any carefully thought out theology. The sect has a conception of Christ of the Divine Lord of the individual conscience ruling directly through the revealed law of His word. The Sectarian type is voluntary, based usually upon a covenant and dependent for its effectiveness upon the cooperation of individual wills. It minimizes all forms of sacramentarianism, insisting that the use of mechanist agencies is inimical to the integrity of the religious life.

The word sect should not be viewed as an invidious term but rather we should hold that both sect and church contain important elements of the wholeness of the church. Both have something to contribute but separately they are inadequate as full representations of the church. Both are a part of the Body of Christ.

2. Oscar Osburn Winther, *The Great Northwest*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947, p. 185.
3. J. M. Mecklin, *The Story of American Dissent*, New York: Brace and Harcourt, 1934, p. 8.
4. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929, p. 145.
5. William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture*, 1765-1840, New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1952, p. 110.
6. Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 181.
7. Elmer Clark, *The Small Sects in America*, New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947, p. 16.

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# III
# THE BODY OF CHRIST

## Introduction to the Study Guide

Ecclesiology was a side issue for most Christian thought until quite recently. Even today there are those who make a distinction between Christianity and what they like to call "Churchianity"; in so doing, they tacitly assume that the Christian Faith is largely a private affair between the soul and God, and that the Church is little more than a man-made association of like-minded people.

This point of view has deep roots in Western Christendom. It is by no means the result of the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the subjective philosophies which have appeared in more recent times, however much these have contributed to it. Rather, its origins are to be seen in that era of the Church's life when Patristic thought gently shifted into what we know as the characteristically Medieval outlook. It came to its fruition in the later middle ages, and one has only to compare the ecclesiologies of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas to be aware of the profound difference which had arisen long before the Reformation. This same change is to be seen on the level of popular piety, which became increasingly subjective during this period.

Although popular Christianity today still shows the effect of late Medieval piety, theologians are now rediscovering the Doctrine of the Church, and the power of their conclusions is being experienced by all those whose Faith has been touched by the Ecumenical Movement. To historians, it may seem that the change is merely part of a movement of thought which everywhere stresses the corporate as opposed to the individual; to ecclesiastical pragmatists, the change seems largely due to pressures for a united Church in face of opposition and inefficiency. Without underestimating the importance of these contributions, we must surely judge the revival of ecclesiology on its own merit and seek explanations which are not connected exclusively with the general intellectual climate of our time.

The most important single influence upon the theologians causing them to reconsider Ecclesiology is undoubtedly the revival of Biblical theology. Biblical criticism has finally led men to become concerned with the entire Biblical outlook; as scholars came to see that the Bible treated its great themes in a way which was very different from Liberal theology, they became particularly dissatisfied with the way in which the Doctrine of the Church had been handled. The contrast between our humanistic or our scholastic attitudes and the Biblical pattern of the People of God is singularly striking.

The sacred communities of the Old and New Testaments obviously play an important part in the whole economy of our salvation. Because the word "Church" does not frequently appear, we have been mistaken in assuming that the Church was irrelevant; the importance of any concept is, after all, not to be measured by word-counting exercises or extreme textual literalism. Rather, we must examine the idea within the framework of images which are relevant to it; in this case, the idea of the Church must be seen in terms of a group of images: Body of Christ, Vine, Bride, Covenant, New Israel, Temple, and others.

Any of these might well have provided material for an introduction to ecclesiology, but the image "Body of Christ" was chosen because it is more intimately connected with Christ's Person, and because of the profound treatment given it by St. Paul. By devoting our time to the exploration of this image, we do not anticipate easy conclusions. It is our hope that the questions which are offered for your discussion may prove provocative and stimulate men of all traditions to re-evaluate their ecclesiologies. There lies before us the possibility that as all our theology becomes more genuinely Biblical, the area of agreement among us will grow, and that we may come to understand more fully the nature of that Unity which God wills for His People.

## THE UNITY OF THE BODY

Is the unity of the Body something given, or is it something to be accomplished?

In what does unity consist? Where is the unity of the Body to be found?

Can the unity of the Body remain hidden or must it by its very nature become manifest?

Are the terms visible and invisible when applied to the Body of Christ helpful terms to use? Are they categories of thought employed by Scripture?

Is denominationalism Biblically permissable or is it inevitably sinful?

Is denominationalism a hindrance or an aid in giving expression to the diversity present within the Body?

Is the unity of the Body an organizational unity? Is it a spiritual unity? What do the terms "organizational" and "spiritual" mean in this context? Are they necessarily opposed?

Can there be unity of the Body without agreement on the essentials of Faith? How do we determine what is essential?

Is the manifestation of the unity of the Body to be attained only at the end of the ages, or is it possible that it can be attained within the framework of history?

Relevant passages: I Cor. 1; I Cor. 12; John 17; Eph. 2, 3, 4: Col. 1, 2; Phil. 1, 2.

## THE DYNAMIC OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

In what sense does Christ's Body share in Christ's life? What is the connection between membership in Christ's Body and our participation in His life, death, resurrection, and risen life? Is this the motivating power and mission of the Church?

What is the relationship between the Spirit of Christ and the Body of Christ? Is the Holy Spirit present outside the Body?

Are the workings of the Holy Spirit normally to be found in the Body? Does membership in the Body make it possible for us to discern the Holy Spirit?

Is the witness of the Holy Spirit to individuals to be tested against the corporate experience of the Body?

Do we run the danger of identifying our human experience with the divine energies of the Holy Spirit?

Relevant passages: John 16; Colossians; Romans 6 and 7; Ephesians 1, 4, and 5.

## INCORPORATION INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

Can a person be a member of the Body of Christ without being a member of a Christian Church?

In view of the image "the Body of Christ", is the Church an organization of like-minded individuals, established by themselves, or an organism called into being by God?

How is one incorporated into the Body of Christ?

Does profession of Faith make a person a member of the Body of Christ? To what extent is faith made a subjective, private relationship?

How is the call of God received? How is it authenticated? What is its relation to incorporation?

Does the act of Baptism give us something which we cannot otherwise have?

To what extent does the method of incorporation determine our doctrine of the Church?

Relevant passages: Romans 6:3; I Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:22; Col. 2:11.

## THE EUCHARIST AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Does participation in the sacramental Body sustain a person in his membership in the mystical Body?

Does the failure to discern the Lord's Body in 1 Cor. 11:29 have reference to both the mystical Body and the sacramental Body? What about the term "the Body of Christ" in 1 Cor. 10:16, 17? Does it refer to Christ's Sacramental Body or does it also refer to the mystical Body?

Does participation in the eucharistic Body create unity? Does it foster unity? Does it do so within the congregation, within the denomination, and within divided Christendom?

Does participation in the eucharist imply a prior unity not only with Christ, but also with our fellow members of Christ's Body the Church?

Is the celebration of Holy Communion an act of the visible or invisible Church? Does the visible Church have the right to define the limits of its borders by reference to participation in the Eucharist?

Relevant passages: I Cor. 10:14ff; I Cor. 11:23ff; John 6.

## CHRISTOLOGY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Does our Christology determine our doctrine of Christ's Body the Church?

Does a low view of the humanity of Christ result in a low evaluation of the human factor in the Church? Is this only a Catholic problem? Within Protestantism, does it sometimes result in a stress upon the invisible at the expense of the visible Church?

Does a low doctrine of the divinity of Christ result in an ecclesiology which sees the Church primarily as a human organization? Is this a problem of liberal Protestants?

Must our Ecclesiology correspond exactly with our Christology? For orthodox Christians, must their Ecclesiology correspond exactly with the formulas of Chalcedon?

## AUTHORITY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

In one of the Pauline Epistles, Christ is referred to as the Head of the Body, in another the whole Body is equated with His Person. What is the significance of this variation?

Since Christ is the Head of the Body, in one of these images,

How is His headship recognized?

How is His headship exercized?

What is the relation between the Headship of Christ and Scripture? between the Headship of Christ and tradition? between the Headship of Christ and reason?

Since Christ's Person is equated with the whole Body in one image, what is our relation to other members of the Body as regards authority?

With respect to apostles, prophets, teachers?

With respect to denominations?

With respect to the whole Body of Christ?

In Ephesians 5, Christ's authority inevitably implies sacrifice leading to cleansing. How does Christ's authority effect cleansing today? If one answers through reform, does this not result in schism and denominationalism?

Relevant passages: Romans 12:3; I Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22; Eph. 4, 5; Col. 1.

## OTHER IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

The image "the Body of Christ" is particularly important because it is more directly related to Christ's Person than most of the others. The same may be true of the image of Him as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride. What is the relation between the Body and the Bride?

Another organic image is that of Christ as the Vine, and his followers as branches drawing their nourishment from Him. Does this type of image

tell us anything about the nature of the Christian community which we do not already know from the "Body of Christ?"

Christ is pictured as the Temple and we are the stones of the Temple. Does this image have something to tell us about the unity of the Church?

Christ pictures his followers as sheep and Himself as their Shepherd. What is the significance of the reference to "other sheep not of this fold?"

Underlying much of His thought is the picture of Christ as Himself the New Israel, reconstituting around Himself a Messianic community. How is this concept to be related to the idea of a covenant relationship with God? Can we think of the Covenant in individualistic terms, or must it be seen in the light of other images?

While most people would agree that the Church is not coextensive with the Kingdom of God, it would seem obvious that there is some relationship between them. What precisely is this relationship? Has modern ecclesiology anything new to say about it?

The Church has sometimes been thought of as Militant, Expectant, and Triumphant. What is the connection of these descriptions with "the Body of Christ" and the "Kingdom of God?" Is part of our trouble with the visibility of the Church connected with this problem?

## IV
## WHERE IS THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH TO BE FOUND NOW?

"Concepts of Christian unity relevant to the Pacific Northwest"

In the light of our biblical study of the church and its historical development in the Northwest, what unity can we hope to realize as we are obedient to God's will? We are the recipients of a sizeable body of insights that come from the World Council of Churches Faith and Order studies and the Oberlin conference on "The nature of the unity we seek" of 1957. Please see the bibliography for a listing of some of the materials which will be helpful in this study.

Out of ecumenical experience certain types of unity have evolved as concepts and as actual existing institutions dedicated to Christian unity. The question we should now consider is how do these types of unity relate to our needs in the Pacific Northwest?

A. Types of Christian unity we should consider as possibilities in the Pacific Northwest.

1. The Church as the family of God.

At the Oberlin conference the section on Imperatives and Motivations to unity had this to say about the unity we seek: "The unity we envisage will be a unity which gives visible expression to the fact that we do belong to the one household of God. Within that Household there will be no barriers to prevent the members of Christ's family from entering fully into that community of shared life, worship, and witness which properly belongs to those who are His own. This will mean a unity in which every ministry is a ministry of and for all the members. It will mean an open welcome to all members of the family to the banquet table at which we receive and celebrate with thanksgiving our new life in Christ. It will mean that beneath all of our various confessions there will be a unity of the church's declared faith." (1) The image of unity this concept would hold is that of a family.

Related to this image of unity as a family are the insights coming from the meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches at St. Andrews the summer of 1960. The statement the Commission presented to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, as reported by a news release from the meeting, declares that the unity sought is primarily a local unity or "one which brings all in each place who confess Christ Jesus as Lord into full, committed fellowship with one another." It also emphasized that the unity sought "is not one of uniformity nor a monolithic power structure." Professor Henri d'Espire, Commission vice-chairman, said the statement implies that there would no longer be in each locality several churches, but one church comprising all those in that locality who confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Further, he said, "their union would be based on the same baptism and express itself by the preaching of the same Gospel and by participation in the one bread." It would mean that "the local community would be linked to the whole Christian community, of all time and of all places by the fact that its ministry and members would be acknowledged by all."

He added that "by its very nature such a unity is visible, but it does not imply a single centralized ecclesiastical institution . . ."

2. Corporate unity.

Bishop Angus Dun defines corporate church union as taking place, "when independent and self-determining Christian bodies form one body where there were two or more previously. It occurs when churches that have behaved as two bodies begin to behave as one body." (2)

The Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches periodically records the number of church mergers that are taking place throughout the world. The trend seems to be in the direction of the reunification of family groups of churches. Witness the reunification in Methodism and Lutheranism in the United States, to cite two examples. The Congregationalist and Evangelical and Reformed Church merger into the United Church of Christ is contrary to that trend. The two most dramatic exceptions are of course the United Church of Canada and the United Church of South India. Every encouragement is given this form of unity. Many denominations such as Baptist and Christian, Episcopal and Methodist, and many others are having union conversations at the present time.

A dissenting note is heard from C. C. Morrison, writing in *What is Christianity*, "An ecumenical church achieved by merging a number of denominations would be only another sect." To many people the complete reunion of all churches into one great church organization is not a possibility or a very pleasant thought.

3. Councils of Churches.

The Pacific Northwest has already in existence the new ecumenical institutional innovation, which are Councils of Churches. These new agencies of interchurch communication and action stand at different levels of development throughout the region. Mergers of denominations are agreements usually arrived at on a national church level. Councils of churches, on the other hand, are usually developed on a city, area or state level as well as the national and world level. What is and should be the role of this new instrument of unity in the life of the church?

In America, councils of churches were originally formed to serve very practical tasks and did not involve themselves in matters of faith and order. The original need was for the joint effort of the churches to meet the disadvantage of a divided church in a largely urban and increasingly complex American culture. It must be said that although the motivations were largelly non-theological, a minority of church leaders, at least, were propelled by the ever present conflict between the Biblical witness to the oneness of the church and the divided nature of the church as it expresses itself in the average American community.

Councils of churches are organized on a democratic and representative basis. They are dedicated to cooperative activity that does not in any way challenge denominational sovereignty. The function of the council in the life of the church has been likened unto that of a catalyst. It serves as an institutional vehicle of communication by means of which churches have come out of isolation into contact, conversation and cooperation with one another. It serves as an agency through which churches unite in agreed-upon aspects of the Christian mission to the area. A council also provides the function of catalyst between the church and the community. The divided

church in America has been ineffective in communicating with the total community. Through a council, the churches can communicate the Gospel to the community more adequately and manifest the essential wholeness of Christ and His church more completely.

The nature of councils is changing as they experience fuller participation by Lutherans, Episcopalians, and the Orthodox. Councils were originally created and dominated by churches of a similar theological perspective that felt no theological difficulties in getting together. With the fuller participation of the aforenamed churches, matters of faith and order have become concerns of every council of churches. Communication, to be helpful in creating fuller unity, must be in the doctrinal as well as the non-doctrinal aspects of the churches' life. The section on "The work of State and Local Councils" at Oberlin, 1957, stated that, "of all presently existing structures, the councils of churches provide the best and most available vehicle for widespread faith and order studies." (3)

What direction the council movement must take in the Pacific Northwest is an important question for all those to consider who are concerned about the unity of Christ's church. In the July 20, 1960 issue of *The Christian Century,* Virgil Lowder reported on an address by Ronald E. Osborn, professor of church history at Christian Theological Seminary, at the Association of Council Secretaries annual conference. Osborn gives a very important role to councils in the future development of the church. He begins with a comparison of the churchly nature of denominations and councils. "Neither denominations nor councils are a part of the essence of the church; both are a part of its history. Councils were brought into being by God because of the limitations of the denominations. Councils manifest the wholeness of the church in away impossible to the denomination." Osborn predicts increasing recognition of the ecclesiological status of councils, and their greater usefulness and acceptance. "The council has put as great a claim on the loyalty of the local church as the denomination," he said. "Originally the denomination was a confessional instrument. It had a peculiar theological base to maintain. But in recent decades the denomination has ceased to be an effective confessional instrument, and the plea that it has a peculiar confession tends to become a hypocritical mark. The peril for the church is that as the denominations cease to be effective confessional instruments they become instruments for power." Osborn predicted increasing recognition of the ministrial function of council executives. "The executive of a council has more ecclesiastical validity than the bishop of one communion," he said.

This is a very provocative statement by one man. It does highlight some of the problems and possibilities as we consider the role of the councils' of churches as a new institutional innovation in the life of the Christian church. What function should they perform as we think about the nature of the church and our relationship to it as churches in the Pacific Northwest?

*Questions*

1. What are some of the essential aspects of the unity you would like to see realized in the Pacific Northwest?
2. What value do you see in corporate unity as a method of reuniting the church? What disvalues do you see in it?

3. What, at present, are the weaknesses of councils of churches as instruments of Christian unity?
4. What function do you see councils of churches performing in the effort toward Christian unity?

B. Next Step and Closing Thoughts.

To the question how shall we move toward greater unity, insights garnered out of study of unity in Massachusetts are valuable. Their central study group suggests at least four different lines of action. (4)

1. Communication or "encounter".

There can be increasing communication or "encounter" between representatives of all denominations, including even those which are unlikely in the foreseeable future to consider union. In spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles to unity, there can be sincere and persistent efforts to achieve deeper insights into the life of one another's churches and fuller apprehension of the meaning of that life for those who partake of it. Where there can not be union or common action there can at least be conversation.

2. Cooperation.

There can be cooperation on a broad basis, as there has been in the past. Some denominations may cooperate only in a limited measure, while others cooperate in many aspects of the Christian ministry; but taken as a whole cooperation may be continued and strengthened and may grow in inclusiveness and in scope of the program. Cooperation provides a climate and contacts favorable to further unity.

3. Closer association and mutual recognition.

This term is used here to mean something more than cooperation and less than complete union. There can be steps toward unity in many diverse ideas of common agreement. Some churches may enter into agreements of intercommunion and intercelebration at the Lord's table, of recognizing one another's minstries, of federated structures.

4. Union of denominations.

Mergers along the pattern of the United Church of Canada and of South India are also possible. If we are to accept the image of the church as the Body of Christ, we are seeking a unity that manifests unity amid great diversity. There are no blueprints. There are but Biblical mandates that push us on.

Ultimately it seems that what we are looking for in the Pacific Northwest is a renewal of the church. A more adequate and whole concept of the church to help us overcome the stratification of the church by economic and social factors, the divisiveness of the denominations due to historical isolation, in order that we might express to the world about us the truth that Christ and His church is but one church. Unity and mission must go together for it was Christ's prayer that His church may be one that the world may know him as Lord.

We shall let Canon Theodore O. Wedel have the last word. "The reunion of churches," he says, "will not emerge merely from summit conferences of ecumenical experts, indispensible though these are. It will come when the call to unity is seen first of all as a call to mission. He who issues this call is still one God. His call is one call. And the gospel of reconciliation between man and God, and man and man is still one gospel. American Christianity is frequently contrasted with the church life of our European

brethren as a Christianity of activism which neglects weightier concerns of faith and doctrine. We need a humbling of our pride, no doubt, and the discipline of the theological schoolroom, yet if our activism can become true obedience to the call to mission, and not a substitute for it, we may yet be instruments in the hand of God to save the ecumenical movement from a burial in an academic coffin." (5)

*Questions*

1. What are the next immediate steps that should be taken toward the wholeness and unity of the church in the Pacific Northwest?

## FOOTNOTES CHAPTER IV

1. Paul S. Minear, *The Nature of the Unity We Seek*, St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958, p. 183.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 222.
4. Central Study Group, op. city., p. 8-9.
5. Theodore O. Wedel, *The Call to Unity in our Time, Religion in American Life*, Summer, 1960, p. 372.

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